SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

September 20, 2005
9:30 – 3:30
Holtville, CA

Welcome and Introductions

Rick Hoffman, Riverside County, welcomed the Advisory Committee members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

Updates from the Resources Agency

Mr. Hoffman noted that the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Department of Fish and Game (DFG) recently held a series of public outreach meetings. Dale Hoffman-Floerke, DWR, provided a summary of the meetings and comments received. Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that five meetings were held from September 13 to 15. The presentation focused on five infrastructure configurations and projected future inflows. The presentation was followed by a break-out session where DWR, DFG and CH2M HILL staff were present to answer questions. The public actively participated in the meetings, asking questions and providing input on the various configurations under consideration. The next series of meetings will be held in six to eight weeks and will focus on the infrastructure configurations not addressed in detail at the recent meetings.

Public Comments

The following public comments were provided:

- Ron Enzweiler, Salton Sea Authority, noted that the Imperial Irrigation District's (IID's) Board of Director's meeting is today, and therefore, IID Board members will not be able to attend the Advisory Committee meeting.

- A member of the public noted that there are limited staff at the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge. This constrains long term planning and management of the refuge, and should be addressed.

QSA Update

Bruce Wilcox, IID, Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), Steve Robbins, Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), and John Scott, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD), provided an update on the progress on Quantification Settlement Agreement implementation.

- **IID/SDCWA Water Transfer Mitigation Measures**—Mr. Wilcox provided an update on the implementation status of the various mitigation measures identified for the IID

Water Conservation and Transfer Project. IID has assumed the lead role on the preparation of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and anticipates beginning the work on the plan early next year. The planning agreement for the Natural Communities Conservation Plan is being finalized.

- **Coachella Canal Lining Project**—The construction of the parallel canal is a few weeks ahead of schedule, and CVWD anticipates beginning concrete lining in November. The entire project is anticipated to be completed in late 2006.
- **All-American Canal Lining Project**—Final design is nearly completed, and IID anticipates releasing the construction bid package in November 2005.
- **Palo Verde Irrigation District Land Management Program**—MWD is working with the Palo Verde Irrigation District (PVID) on implementation of the PVID Land Management and Crop Rotation Program. This program is anticipated to lessen or possibly eliminate the need for additional water transfers from IID to fulfill the Interim Surplus Guidelines "benchmarks."
- **1998 IID/MWD Water Conservation Project**—IID and MWD are working to establish a fixed annual amount of water to be transferred under this agreement.

Update on Project Status

Gwen Buchholz, CH2M HILL, provided an update on the project status and schedule. The Work Groups are in the process of defining the project's goals and objectives, which will be used to focus the range of alternatives considered. Due to the project timeline, these efforts are being conducted in parallel and will be integrated shortly. The preferred alternative will likely be selected after release of the draft programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) and before release of the final PEIR.

The next steps include definition of the project alternatives and preparation of the draft Ecosystem Restoration Study (ERS) and draft PEIR. The number of alternatives to be carried forward for detailed analysis in the ERS and PEIR has not been determined. The preliminary engineering designs included in the ERS will consider phased construction due to changes in future inflows for each alternative.

The ERS will include capital along with operations and maintenance costs for each alternative. An Advisory Committee member suggested that cost be considered when selecting a preferred alternative. In addition, a member of the public noted that the cost of an alternative is important because very costly projects may not be economically feasible.

The Financing Plan will be prepared after a preferred alternative is selected. Based on a question from a Committee member, it was suggested that the content and level of detail of this Plan be discussed at a future meeting.

Work Group Updates

Gwen Buchholz, David Christophel, Darryl Hayes, and Armin Munevar of CH2M HILL provided updates on the progress of the various Work Groups.

Habitat Work Group

Mr. Christophel provided an update on the progress of the Habitat Work Group. The Work Group held its third meeting on September 8, 2005. Various topics were addressed including revised habitat goals and conservation objectives, relative value of shallow freshwater and saline water habitats to birds, and infrastructure configurations.

The Work Group also continued its discussion of consistency with the intent of the project legislation, and specifically, the intent of the term "historic." The Work Group is currently discussing the advantages and disadvantages of using 1999 as the 'goal' for restoration of historic diversity. Based on a question from the public, it was noted that the "historic target" is one of the project's goals and objectives, and not the project's "baseline" as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act.

The next Habitat Work Group meeting will be held on October 6. Various topics have been proposed including options for preserving upland habitat values, habitat protection strategies, historic habitat and wildlife use of the Salton Sea ecosystem, and shallow water habitat management. Based on a question from the public, it was noted that the Work Group will be discussing ways to minimize construction-related impacts at future meetings.

Inflow/Modeling Work Group

Mr. Munevar provided an update on the progress of the Inflows/Modeling Work Group. The Work Grouping held its fourth meeting on September 16, 2005 to discuss development of the hydrologic model. This 'top-level' water balance modeling tool will serve a variety of functions including: (1) evaluating changes to hydrologic and salinity factors under various restoration alternatives; (2) assisting in selection and evaluation of restoration alternative configurations; and (3) serving as a publicly-available analysis tool. Additional tools will be developed to address other water quality and hydrologic considerations.

Based on a question from a member of the public, it was noted that water transfers beyond those identified in the project Legislation are not part of the project and were not specifically included in the inflow variability analysis. The analysis considers a broad range of factors that could affect future inflows from the IID water service area but does not address the factors in detail. A report describing the inflow analysis is under preparation and will be available shortly.

The next Inflows/Modeling Work Group meeting will be held on October 28.

Air Quality Work Group

Ms. Buchholz provided an overview of the progress of the Air Quality Work Group. The Work Group held a meeting on September 12, and plans to hold its next meeting on November 9. The Work Group is reviewing preliminary reports and providing comments to DWR and DFG on these documents.

Various air quality-related tasks are underway including the following: preparation of reports on playa and non-playa emissions; refinement of the Air Quality No Action Alternative report; wind-tunnel and PI-SWERL testing (weather permitting); evaluation of 10-meter and 2-meter co-located monitoring data; and refinement of the water demands for air quality management actions.

Infrastructure/Alternatives Work Group

Mr. Hayes provided an overview of the progress of the Infrastructure/Alternatives Work Group. Based on the configurations discussed at the August Work Group, additional habitat-related information was prepared for the Habitat Work Group on four infrastructure configurations. Similar information is being prepared on the remaining configurations for Habitat Work Group review. Based on a question from a Committee member, it was noted that the Infrastructure/Alternatives Work Group is defining overall infrastructure components and considerations. These will be refined once more information is available from the Habitat Work Group. The Infrastructure/Alternatives Work Group will work with the Habitat Work Group to incorporate specific habitat features into each configuration. A report on the infrastructure configurations is under preparation and will be distributed after DWR review.

USBR Feasibility Study Update

Secretary Chrisman noted that Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) was unable to attend today's meeting. Mr. Walker will provide an update on the USBR's feasibility study at a future meeting.

Science Panel Update

Doug Barnum, U.S. Geological Survey, provided an update on the progress on the Science Panel. Bruce White, University of California at Davis, was added to the panel to provide air quality expertise.

The Panel has recently reviewed various topics, including selenium, ecological health risk, fugitive dust and remote sensing (establishment of background levels), long-term monitoring plans, input to modeling for nutrient cycling, thermocline modeling, and hydrogen sulfide formation. Dr. Barnum noted that the Panel is continuing its discussion of thermocline development and hydrogen sulfide production; however, very little information is available on the topic.

Next panel meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 2.

Introduction to New Website

Chuck Keene, DWR, provided an overview of the new project website. The website is a work in progress and will continually be updated and modified as the project moves forward. The new website includes a calendar page for all current and past meetings, project deliverables, and reference documents. The new website address is www.saltonsea.water.ca.gov, and the Colorado River and Salton Sea office address is www.crss.water.ca.gov.

Development of Screening Criteria

Ms. Buchholz provided an overview of the process and considerations used to develop goals and objectives. The goals and objectives will be used to focus the overall number of alternatives considered in detail in the draft PEIR and ERS.

Ms. Buchholz noted that many different objectives will drive the formation of alternatives, including inflows, habitat areas and habitat types, water treatment, and exposed playa areas. With regard to inflows, a range of inflows from about 600 thousand acre-feet (KAF) to 950 KAF are expected to occur over the next 75 years. These values provide a range; however, there is limited certainty as to how inflows will change over the next 75 years, and changes in a variety of factors can affect future inflows. In general, the barrier alternatives configured for 600 KAF of inflows can operate over a wide range of inflow scenarios; however, the alternatives configured for 950 KAF of inflows at a given barrier location generally cannot meet marine sea salinity and elevation targets successfully if flows fall below that level for a sustained period.

Ms. Buchholz provided an overview of some of the project objectives. Below is a summary of this discussion.

- **Salinity Goal for Open Sea**—Salinity goal is critical consideration for the project's water balance. The project Legislation does not specify a salinity goal for the project, but does state that salinity should be targeted to maintain a stable habitat. The Committee agreed that the project should target a marine environment with a salinity of 30,000 to 40,000 milligrams per liter.

- **Elevation Goal for Open Sea**—The project team is using a target elevation of -235 feet mean sea level (msl) for analysis purposes. The Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of selecting a specific elevation target, multiple elevation targets, a target range, or no elevation target at all. The intent of the State legislation and the differences between a stable elevation and a stable shoreline were discussed. The Committee agreed that multiple elevation targets should be considered, and agreed to focus efforts on an elevation target between -230 and -235 msl.

One Committee member suggested setting an elevation target that was practical for the alternative under consideration if it made practical sense (i.e. to reduce pumping requirements).

Committee members requested that the following be provided for each alternative at a future meeting: amount of exposed area under differing elevations; distance from the existing shoreline to the new shoreline for key areas around the Sea; and, average and maximum depth of the open Sea.

- **Shallow Saline and Fresh Water Habitat Goals**—The Habitat Work Group is considering potential locations for both fresh and saline shallow water habitat areas within the Sea-bed, and integration of these areas with adjacent land uses. It is important to understand the goals and objectives for the different types of habitat, and how this relates to the needs of different target species. Additional specificity on habitat areas is also needed to better determine the amount and quality of water needed for these areas, and account for this in the overall project water balance.

- **Local Land Use Planning Influence on Habitat Objectives**—The county General Plans are currently being used as the basis for future land use changes. The Committee may choose to use these plans or assume some changes to these plans based on the needs of the restoration project. It was noted that both county General Plans do not contemplate any change in use of the Salton Sea or lands currently submerged by the Sea. Various Committee members noted that the counties will need to adjust their plans accordingly as the project is implemented and former Sea-bed areas become exposed.

  The Committee agreed that the existing General Plans and the Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan should be used as the basis for future land use changes, and the project should not attempt to project land use changes beyond what is described in these plans. The Committee requested information on ownership of area under the Sea to better understand the amount of land public and private ownership. One Committee Member suggested that the project consider the use of conservation easements. Another Committee Member noted that the project may need to consider land swaps and other actions if project-related actions and facilities on refuge lands were not consistent with the purpose of the refuges or the refuge act.

- **Water Treatment to Reduce Ecological and Human Health Risks**—At a previous Committee Meeting, the Committee agreed that the project should be consistent with existing regulatory standards. However, some of these standards are currently being established or are being modified. The Committee agreed to use the State standards for the project. These standards can be found in the Water Quality Control Plan for the Colorado River Region and the State regulations controlling toxics..

Various Committee Members suggested that the project consider selenium source control actions in the Upper Colorado River Basin. In addition, various Committee Members suggested that the project consider a worst-case scenario and include treatment and reduction opportunities within the Salton Sea watershed. Cost estimates for both Upper Basin source control and treatment in the watershed were requested.

- **Air Quality Management Goals for Exposed Playa**—The technical team is currently assuming air quality management action would occur on all of the exposed playa areas. However, it is recognized that a variety of actions will result in exposed playa including, the QSA, other actions in the watershed such as reduced flows from Mexico in the New River, and the restoration project itself. The project currently assumes that all of the exposed area will be mitigated either by the project or by the QSA mitigation actions. There was an extensive discussion by the Committee on the air quality goals of the project and air quality mitigation responsibilities for exposed playa areas as a result of these actions.

  It was noted that the Coachella Valley State Implementation Plan requires landowners to mitigate for dust (particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter) emissions from their lands. The Imperial Valley State Implementation Plan is currently being revised and is anticipated to contain similar rules.

Other Items

A Committee Member suggested forming a Financing Work Group to assist in development of the Financing Plan.

Summary and Action Items

The next Advisory Committee meeting will be held on November 1 at the California State Association of Counties in Sacramento.

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations and related materials:

- Update on Project Status and Schedule
- Habitat Work Group Update
- Inflows/Modeling Work Group Update
- Air Quality Work Grouping Update
- Alternatives (Infrastructure) Work Group Update
- Introduction to New Website
- Development of Goals and Objectives to Define Alternatives

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Jose Angel, Regional Water Quality Control Board
Marie Barrett, New River Citizens Congressional Task Force
Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Bart Christensen, State Water Resources Control Board
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau
Debi Livesay, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Sylvia Oey, Air Resources Board
Brad Poiriez, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority
Steve Robbins, Coachella Valley Water District
John Scott, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Dan Walsworth, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District
John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments